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3 1984 VOLUME 23 MARCH

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With Mother Teresa on Tayuman Street

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5 *PETER IS HERE: The tomb of St. Pet humble 'epicenter' at the foundations op Vatican basilica—testifies to centuries faith for generations of Christians.*

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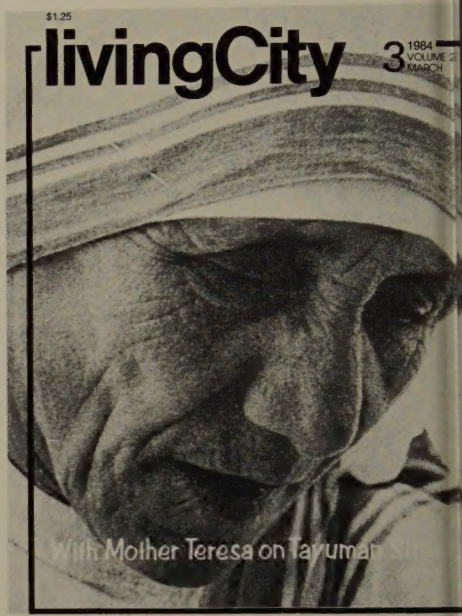

Living City is published 11 times a year (10 monthly and a bimonthly issue in August-September) by the Focolare Movement, a non-profit corporation, P. O. Box 496, New York, NY 10021.

Subscription prices for one year: USA and possessions: US$12.75; Canada: US$15.00; Elsewhere: US$18.00; Air Mail (all countries): US$25.00.

An envelope is enclosed in each magazine for subscription orders and inquiries: LIVING CITY, P. O. Box 126, Jamaica, NY 11415.

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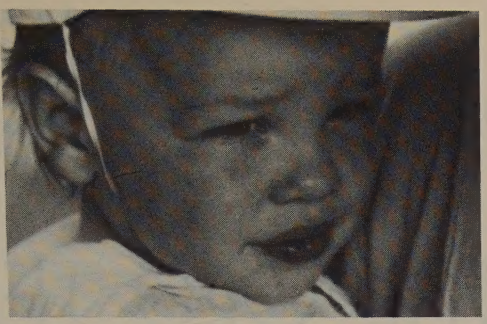

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OTHER ENGLISH EDITIONS:
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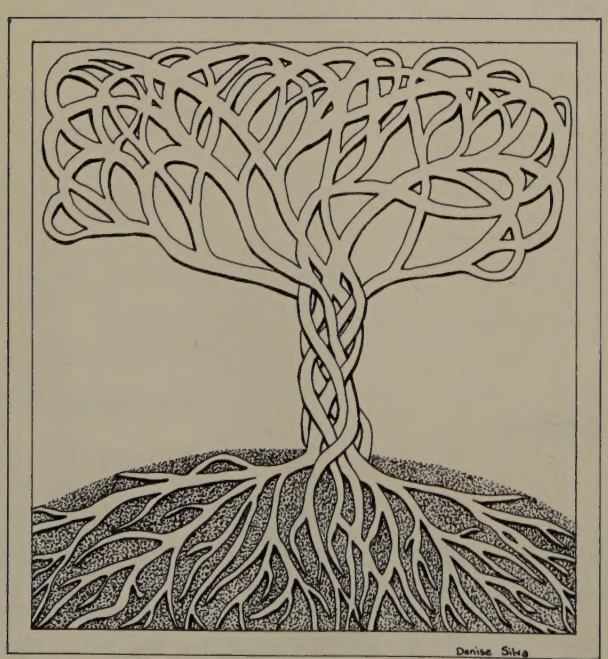
2. "New City" - P. O. Box 332 - Manila, Philippines
3. "New City" - 367 Balwyn Rd. - Balwyn North 3104 - Australia

UNITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Beginning with this issue we will bring you a series of articles on the spirituality of unity prepared for us by Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement. In this first installment the topic is: Unity in the Old Testament.

by CHIARA LUBICH



Even this century of ours has seen and continues to see a rich blossoming of religious movements—a clear sign of the Church's vitality. Quite often the main emphasis of these movements hinges on Christian love, on communion, on the community, and on unity.

A typical example is the Focolare Movement whose spirituality can be defined as the "Spirituality of Unity." Its aim is to bring to those who do not possess or have lost their faith, and also to the faithful of other religions, the gift of believing in Christ and bringing about the unity that he asked of his followers. The Focolare Movement wishes to help Christians of various traditions to find once again the ecclesial unity that has been lost. Finally as a movement within the Catholic Church, the Focolare is committed to helping the members of various other movements, communities, congregations, parishes and dioceses to live more fully the reality of already being one, united by their common faith.

The spirituality of unity stems from Jesus' prayer to the Father, "That all may be one," from which it bursts forth like a spring of living water to quench the burning thirst of so many in our day.

It is a spirituality which took its life from the New Testament and in it finds its very reason for being.

Yet we might ask ourselves: is this concept of unity mentioned only in the New Testament or do its roots appear already in the Old Testament? On reading and meditating the Bible we find that the answer to this question is yes.

In a certain way, the Old Testament already speaks of unity, but in order to understand it, we must consider the concept the people of Israel had of God.

The God of Israel is the God who is holy, totally different from any human reality, the "transcedent" we would say today. He is the "living," "personal" God who establishes a personal relationship with the people of Israel as a community and with each member individually. This is how this people had experienced God throughout its history.

This characteristic of a "personal" God is in a singular way manifested in his "zeal" and in his "jealousy." He does not tolerate other divinities in his place or on his same level as was common in ancient politheistic cultures. Israel, with its adherence to monotheism, practical rather than philosophical, had for many centuries no other God except Jahweh.

And it is exactly this unique experience of Israel with its God that leads the people to understand that Jahweh is the one God in an absolute sense, different from all the other deities which were mere "vanity" and "nullity." Jahweh alone is God:

"Before me no god was formed,
and after me there shall be none.
I am the Lord and there is no other.
there is no God besides me."

Isaiah 43:10; 45:5.

Therefore it was only after the uniqueness and oneness of God had been so definitively established by Israel that, with the coming of Christ, the mystery of the Trinity could be revealed.

The revelation of the Old Testament already shows us the one, holy, living and personal God who is close to his people because he loves them. But the New Testament will reveal the roots of this love: God does not merely exist in sublime solitude and self-contemplation. He is a living reality. He is, in himself mutual love. This is why he loves Israel, why he loves mankind and all creation.

Thus, if the people of Israel know only that God is one and that he loves them, but do not know the roots of this love, it could only be in the light of New Testament revelation that we can adequately speak of unity, which is both unity and distinction at the same time.

Nevertheless, speaking of unity in the Old Testament we can already distinguish the two essential aspects which we find synthesized in Jesus' words "Ut omnes unum sint" ("That all may be one")[1]: universality, as under-

lined by the word "omnes," all, and unity, expressed in the word "unum," one.

In the Old Testament in fact we find numerous statements referring to the universal dimension of God's will to save all people.

As we know, the history of salvation—which began with the calling of the Patriarchs and continued down through the history of the people of God to the time of Jesus, the birth of the Christian community and its growth throughout the ages—is all part of the history of mankind and of the universe. The Bible presents the story of God with his people developing between the history of the primitive era and of the final era, both on a universal level.

And just as the primitive history (the first chapters of Genesis) deals specifically with the world in the magnitude of creation and with humanity in the multiplicity of all peoples, the final history of the people of God (The Apocalypse) finds its place within the vast horizon of humanity and the cosmos.

Looking, for the moment, at primitive history, we can see that it contains a strong element of universality and unity in the very concept of creation: God, the only God, is the creator of the entire universe, and everything that exists is seen as a unitarian whole; the single elements are not isolated from one another but form a unity since everything is God's creation.

At the apex of creation, God created man (meaning all men and women) in his own likeness, as persons whom he can address as 'you', capable of establishing a rapport with him, a substantial rapport which defines man, which distinguishes him and which, according to the German theologian Westermann, "has value beyond all the differences among people, beyond differences in religion, and even beyond the fact of believing or not believing..."[2]

It is because of this rapport with God on the level of existence that humanity is one: by their very origin all human beings are equal to one another.

A strong element of unity and universality is therefore inherent to the story of creation.

We shall continue this analysis which, while giving evidence of the one God whom we adore and of the reality of unity in all that exists, also fascinates and attracts those who wish to pursue it, and encourages them to bring it about among all people and re-inforce its imprint throughout the whole universe.

to be continued

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1) Jn. 17:21. 3) Westermann, *Genesis.*

PETER IS HERE

A tomb buried in "Nero's Garden," then a storeroom; three centuries later the basilica of Constantine was built on top of it.

Kim Rowley

by HEINZ PFEIFFER

Watching the crowds of pilgrims and tourists edging their way into St. Peter's during this Holy Year, one can't help being impressed by their unfailing expressions of awe and astonishment at the sight of the basilica's magnificence. It wasn't merely its gigantic size or the majestic proportions of its dome and vaults, however, which overwhelm the visitor. The density of historical content, of faith and devotion is transmitted a little from everything: the walls, the paintings, the mosaics and the monuments.

Whether we look at all this splendor from inside St. Peter's or stand outside in the immense square 'embraced' by Bernini's two colonnades, we are apt to forget that all this started with a simple, humble little tomb on the slope of a Vatican hill next to the circuses of the Emperors Nero and Caligula. A hole dug into the earth, encircled by bricks and barely covered by a sloping tile roof, was all that could be seen of the resting place of the first bishop of Rome who had died on the cross under Nero, and whom a few faithful had buried there during the second half of the first century. At that time there was only a scattering of tombs in this area which later, during the third century, was made into a cemetery. Peter's tomb remained one of the poorest even though, by that time, that is, from the second century on, it was surmounted by a shrine with two tiny columns.

The situation changed radically with Emperor Constantine and the official recognition of Christianity. The cemetery was destroyed and put partly underground. Only what remained of that tomb, which in all probability had been damaged in one of the previous persecutions, was still standing and became the central nucleus of the apse of an enormous basilica built over it. It had

TOP LEFT: The carved inscription's marking the hole in the wall where, according to archeologist Margherita Guardacci, the remains identified as those of the Apostle Peter have been hidden since the fourth century.

LEFT: The Vatican basilica has a humble 'epicenter' in its foundations. It is the tomb of St. Peter which testifies to almost twenty centuries of faith for generations of Christians.

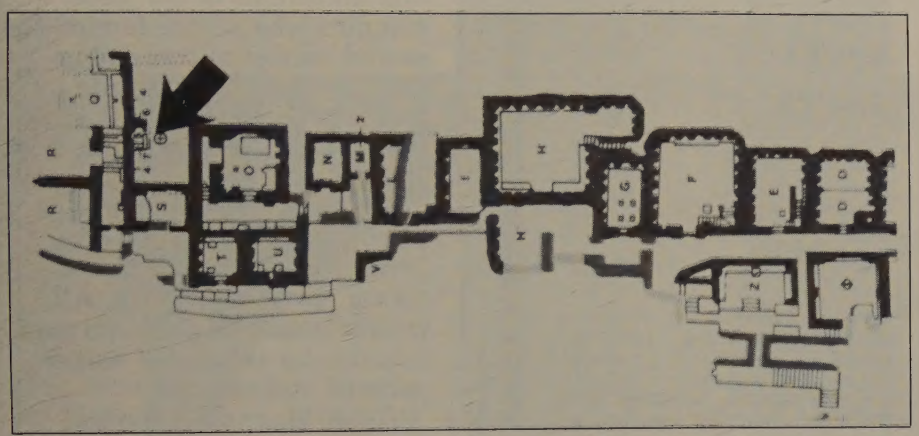
ABOVE: The monuments's reconstruction.

five naves and a transept which enclosed the new sepulcral monument built over the area corresponding to Peter's tomb.

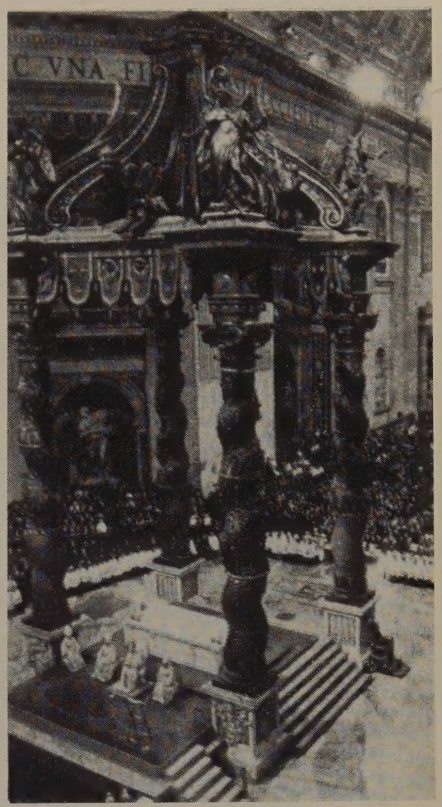
The ruins of a few mausoleums of the old cemetery were uncovered and restored during the excavations done shortly before the Jubilee Year 1950. Together with the "Sacred Island" near Rome's ancient sea port Ostia Antica, these ruins are the most perfect example of what a Roman cemetery looked like.

Not many visitors of this Holy Year which is now concluding had an occasion to visit these excavations, and only those with a good archeological preparation could discover in Saint Peter's the visible remains of the epoch of Constantine and previous periods. On the site of the ancient apse of Constantine's basilica the four

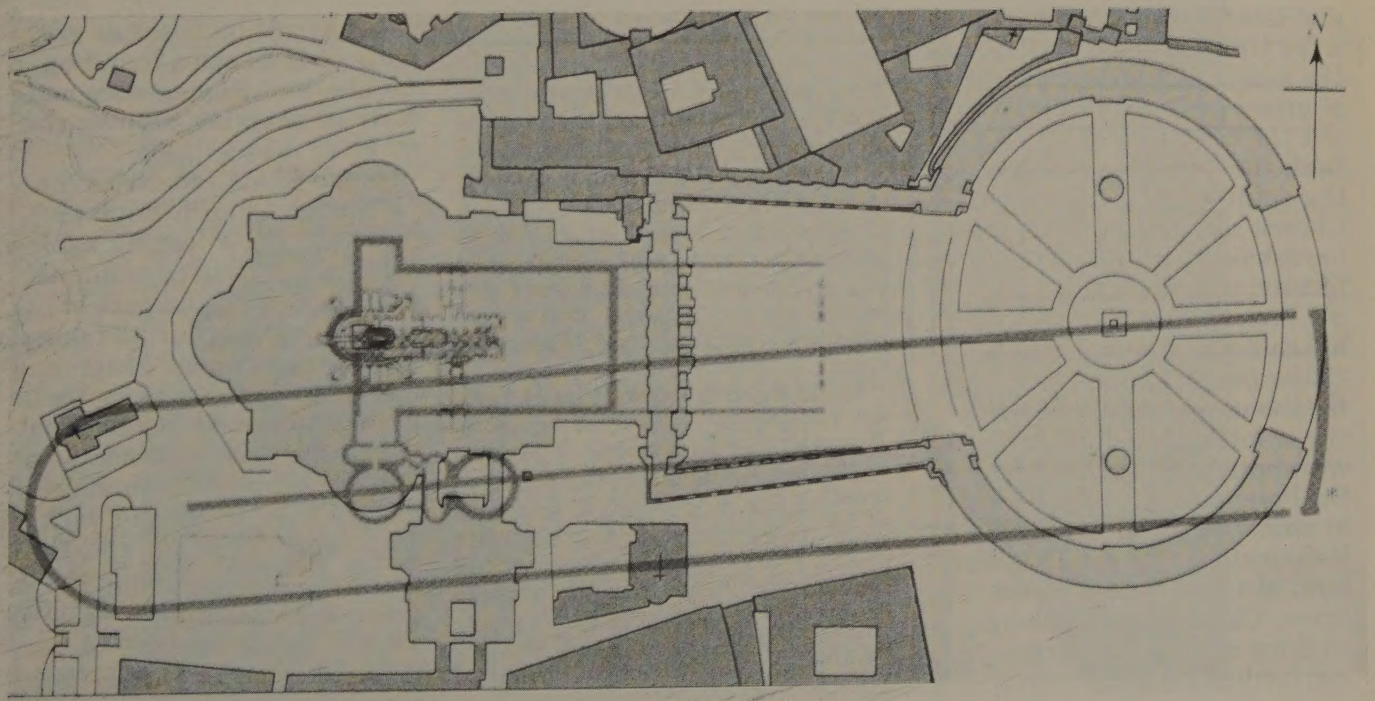
(Continued on page 8)



Map of the pagan cemetery where Peter's tomb (indicated by the arrow) was located.



BELOW: Constantine's basilica and later the present St. Peter's basilica were built over the necropolis situated near Nero's Circus. The apse of both constructions was centered directly above the apostle's tomb.
RIGHT: The massive columns of Bernini's canopy, like so many copies in Renaissance and Baroque churches, derive their form from the spiral column of Solomon's portico in the first basilica of Jerusalem.

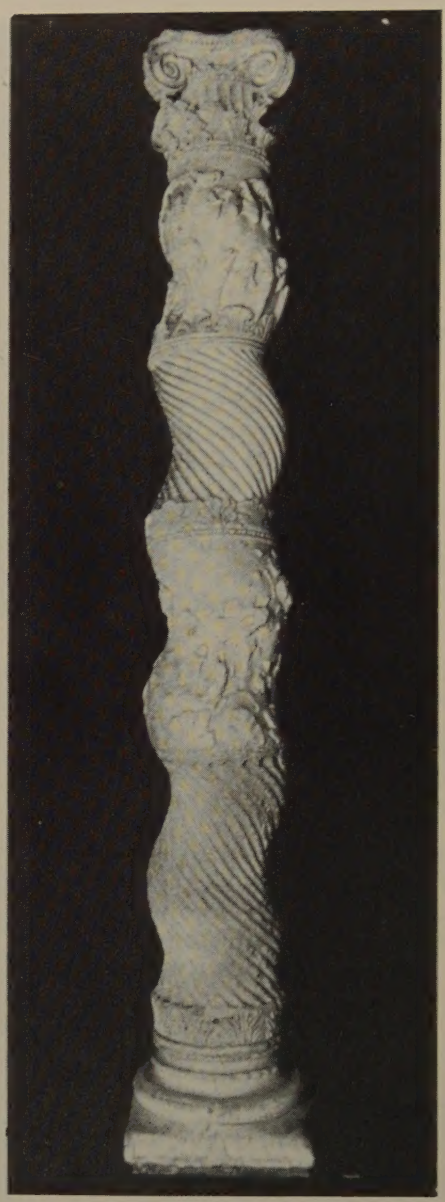


(Continued from page 6)

bronze columns upholding Bernini's canopy now stand. A few meters under the Altar of Confession we can still find Peter's burial place with some of the reminders of the various stages of its transformation in the course of the first three centuries—some wall fragments, a small column and a base. That's all.

It was in a hole inside one of these walls that the bones of the Apostle had been laid. Emperor Constantine held then in great honor as is indicated by the gold-embroidered royal purple material in which the relics were found wrapped. The hole was probably dug into the wall to hide the relics and protect them from vandalism. Deep inside, on the right, a hand painstakingly carved the Greek words "Petros eni" —Peter is here.

Here, in front of this tomb, and later at the altar built over it by Gregory the Great around the year 1,000, multitudes of pilgrims have gathered throughout the centuries. With their faith they, too, have sustained the spiritual structure of the Church against the trials and hardships which often were focused on these very walls. St. Francis came here to offer his choice of poverty and St. Catherine of Siena prayed here for the unity of the Church in the troubled period of Avignon with both pope and anti-pope. St. Peter Canisio stopped here in another critical moment, the Reformation. We can envision how, already in the earliest times, Christians came here to draw strength to face martyrdom.



A spiral column decorated with vine leaves from Constantine's basilica. According to tradition, it belonged to the temple of Jerusalem and was put here to symbolize the continuity of God's alliance with Israel and with the Church. In the Church Peter represents a column or pillar. The vine leaves winding around the column signify the secret of the Church's perennial vitality—the presence of Christ.

The only thing from Constantine's time still existing today is one original spiral column and imitations of her sister columns which once formed the sacred enclosure containing the graves of Constantine's basilica. Tradition has it that the first of these columns, now kept in St. Peter's treasury next to the sacristy, once belonged to the temple of Jerusalem. It is a tradition we can no longer verify. All we know today is that no such columns (of that or of earlier periods) still exist.

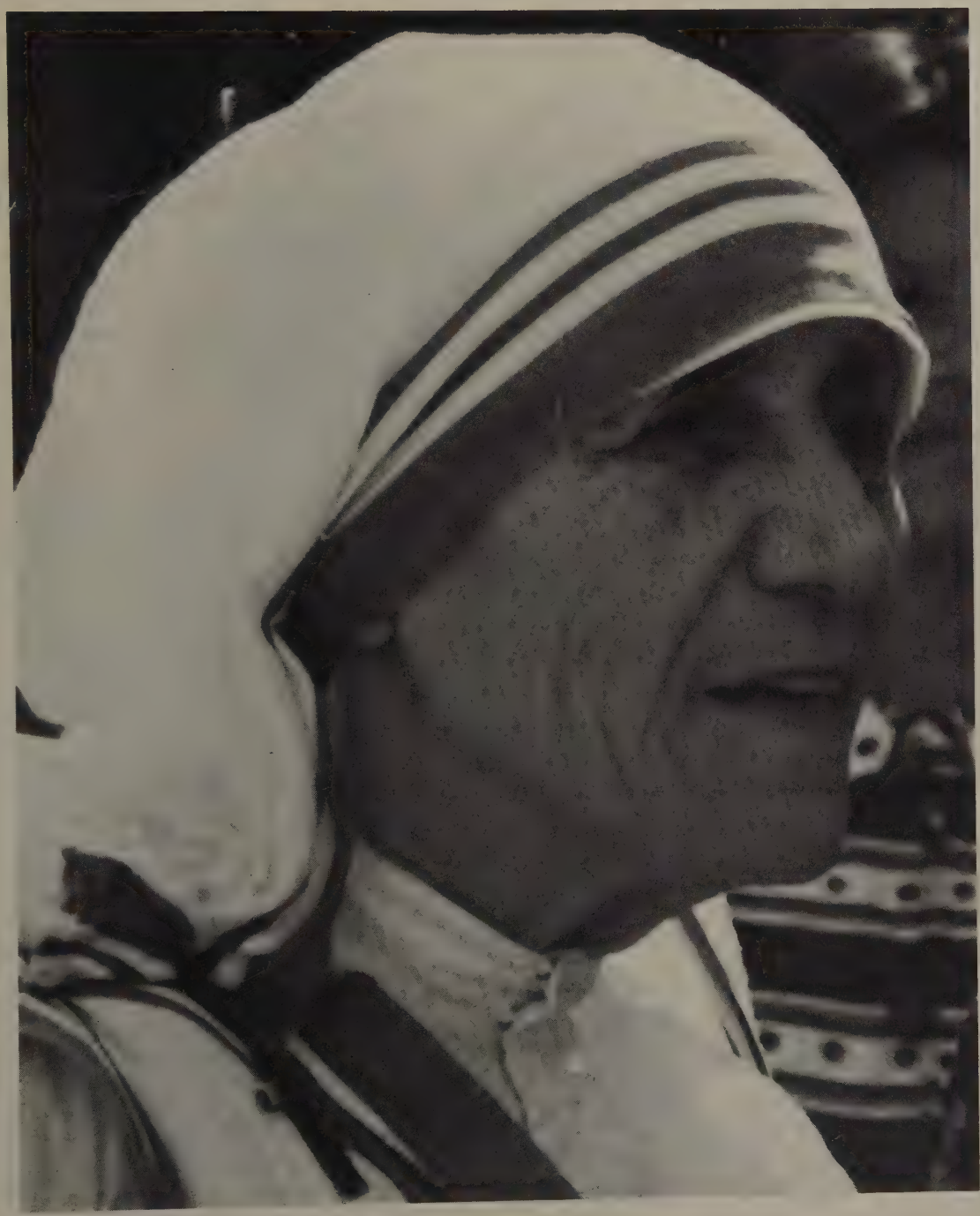
To see this type of spiral column today, the visitor to St. Peter's must look up into the dome at the columns inserted in the balconies above the four pillars of the dome. Some are actually of Constantine's time, others are copies from the time of Michaelangelo. The massive columns of Bernini's bronze canopy were also inspired by these as are many of the copies found on the altars of Renaissance and Baroque churches all over the world.

In one of his tapestries for the Sistine Chapel, Raphael shows St. Peter leaning against one of these twisted columns still supposed to be part of Solomon's portico in the temple of Jerusalem where Jesus himself had taught prior to giving his special mandate to Peter. The temple stands as a symbol of God's continuing alliance with Israel and with the Church. Here the apostle stands as a 'pillar' while the vine's leafy decoration signifies the secret of the Church's perennial vitality—the presence of Christ. □

WITH MOTHER TERESA ON TAYUMAN STREET

"Here you will see people who suffer, but you will not see despair. They are looking for something more than just material relief."

by JOSEPH BUSH



"I'll never forget one day I was walking in the streets of London when I saw a man sitting in the street, looking very miserable, very lonely, very unwanted, just sitting there in the street. So I went very close to him and taking his hand I asked, 'How are you.' My hands are always very warm and that man looked at me and said, 'After a long, long time, this is the first time I feel the warmth of a human hand.' That warmth of the human hand changed his very face; there was a smile. His eyes were brightening and he was like a different person."

There, on Tayuman Street, in Tondo, one of the poorest areas of Manila, Mother Teresa of Calcutta was speaking to large crowd which had filled the hall of the courtyard of the Center of the Missionaries of Charity immediately following the profession of vows made by some of the novices. Her words were filled with peace and certainty even though one could detect almost an urgency in her voice: "Holiness is not the luxury of a few," she continued, "it's a simple duty for you and for me. How do we become holy? By prayer, through prayer; because prayer gives us a clean heart. The fruit of prayer is love, and the fruit of love is service. And works of love are works of peace. Perhaps you just give a

"A CALL WITHIN A CALL"

Agnes Gonscha Boyaxhim was born on August 27, 1910, in Skipje, which was then Albania, now Yugoslavia. She grew up in the serene atmosphere of a modest and very united family. In the period of her youth, the Yugoslav Jesuits accepted the request to begin work in the diocese of Calcutta, and one of them sent to his land letters which were so full of enthusiasm that they put fire in the hearts of those who read them. Agnes was among them. At twelve she was already sure that God was calling her in a very particular way.

In 1928, at the age of eighteen, she entered the Sisters of Loreto, a missionary order with many institutions in India. There she was to be sent very soon to Darjeeling. For the next seventeen years, Agnes, now with the name of Teresa, taught and later served as principal of St. Mary's High School run by the Congregation in Calcutta, where the daughters of the richest Bengali families were studying. In those years, something she had kept in her heart for a long time matured as a very strong desire: to devote herself completely to the "poorest of the poor" who were in great numbers, especially since a terrible famine had left destitute more than two million Indians.

On September 10, 1946, during a trip by train, Sister Teresa felt very clearly a second call from God, "a call within a call," she later explained. The request to leave the order of the Sisters of Loreto was sent to Pope Pius XII whose approval was to start an adventure which would embrace an always greater number of people. This led to the birth of the Missionaries of Charity.

On December 28, 1948 Mother Teresa gathered her first group of very poor children out in the open. That first day they were five, the second day twenty-one, the third already more than forty. During the very first months she was working alone but she prayed to the Blessed Virgin for help. On March 19, 1949 a nineteen-year old Bengali girl presented herself to Mother Teresa. She was one of her former students who had decided to follow her teacher's footsteps. She became the first companion of Mother Teresa; her name was Agnes. Fifteen days later, a second former student of St. Mary's High School arrived to join the foundress.

Mother Teresa with one of the children at the Center for assistance in Tondo, one of the poorest areas of Manila.

smile to someone; but very often a smile is the beginning of great love."

Mother Teresa's life is a continual experience of universal brotherhood, aimed at recognizing Jesus especially in the "poorest of the poor," because they too have been created for the same purpose like you and I, for greater things, to love and to be loved."

"Some time ago in Calcutta we ran short of sugar for our children and a little Hindu boy, four years old, heard that Mother Teresa had no sugar. So he went home and told his parents, 'I will not take sugar for three days and I will give my sugar to Mother Teresa.' After three days they brought him to our house and he had a little bottle in his hands. That little bottle taught me a very

wonderful lesson: to realize that it is not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving. Because we are human beings, everything is small, but once we have given it to God it becomes infinite."

Mother Teresa has a special style for using contrasts: the very small and the infinite, the poorest and the richest, the well-known and the recent discovery. "Some months ago when I was in Beirut taking care of some children. We had nothing in the house except a few carpets. However, I was so taken aback by what I saw that evening... Families, and they were not rich people, everybody around that area brought something. I saw little children going home and bringing their own clothes to put on other children who badly needed them. It was such a wonderful creation of God's love, right there in the midst of so much suffering."

"Just before I left Calcutta two young people came to our house, Hindu people. And they gave me a large amount of money so that I could feed the people. We cook for 9,000 people everyday in Calcutta. I was surprised at such a large amount of money. 'How did you get so much money?' I asked them. And they answered me. 'We got married two days ago. Before our marriage we decided that we would not have a big wedding feast and we would not buy wedding clothes. We decided that we would give the money we saved to you so that you could feed the people.' I asked them, 'Why did you do that?' As you know, in a Hindu family, especially in a big family, a rich family, it's like a scandal not to have a wedding feast. But then they answered me, 'Mother, we love each other so much that we wanted to obtain special blessing from God by making a sacrifice, by giving something special to each other'."

Recounting these episodes Mother Teresa's face takes on a special expression which touches the hearts of those present. After her talk she invited everyone to visit the Center of the Missionaries, not so much the buildings as the "poorest of the poor" who live there, "honored guests" welcomed in everyday by the sisters.

"If you come around," Mother Teresa explained, "you will see people, you will see suffering, yes, terrible suffering; but you won't see despair. These people are looking for something more. That's why I always say that I don't need people who give me money just like that. I need your hands to be able to serve and your hearts to be able to love. Together we are going to so something beautiful for God."

LOVE IN ACTION

An exclusive interview with Mother Teresa by New City Press, Philippines.

Today is a great feast for all of us and especially for you. What does it mean for you to see these young women dedicating their lives for this work of God?

Through their vows they become the spouses of Jesus Crucified, because they make of their vows an act of love to Christ—the undivided love of chastity, the true freedom of poverty, and the total surrender of obedience. And they give a wholehearted and free service to the "poorest of the poor."

We know that your activities and all your works are based on a deep relationship with God. What is in your experience the relation between the contemplative and the active life?

Work is not prayer and prayer is not work. But if we make of our work a prayer, then we are contemplatives in the heart of the world. If we do it with Jesus, if we do it for Jesus, if we do it to Jesus, then we are twenty-four hours a day with Jesus and that's how we become contemplatives in the heart of the world.

It is not our vocation to serve the poor; our vocation is to belong to Jesus. It's a conviction that nothing and no one will separate us from the love of Christ. The work that we do is our love for Jesus put into action. Just as married people, after they get married, they 'belong' to one another and become one flesh — and that oneness is the family — so we too, by consecrating our lives to God, we belong to Christ and become one with

A novice of the Missionaries of Charity of Mother Teresa at work in Tondo.

Jesus. In that oneness which is our "family," we belong to the poorest of the poor.

Where do you suggest to the youth of today to channel their enthusiasm and generosity?

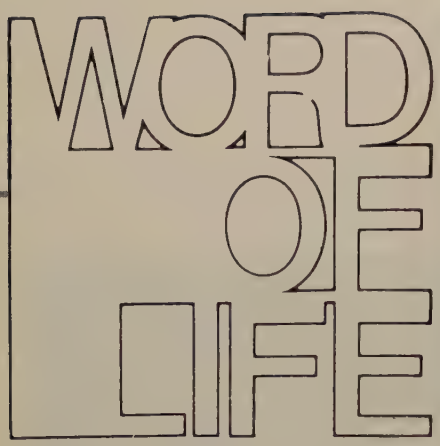
To the Eucharist and the poor; to see Jesus in the Bread of Life and to receive him; and to see Jesus in the poorest of the poor and to serve him through prayer.

Mother Teresa, you have travelled all over the world. What do you think is the most pressing need of people today?

I think that most people are hungry for God. By giving them more opportunity to serve the poor, this longing is put into action through serving. Then they come into very close contact with God, very close. That's why we always try to have our homes very close to the rich people so they can come and do something. And it is also a wonderful thing that they can share, that they come to know each other, the rich and the poor. Then they begin to realize that they are brothers and sisters because they have been created for the same purpose, to love and to be loved.

Everybody knows of your work among the "poorest of the poor." How do you express your presence in the materially rich countries?

By giving them more opportunity to share the joy of loving; many people bring food and everything... Our work has created in the world an awareness of the presence of the poor. Now everybody knows who the poor are, and there is a greater concern, a greater awareness. Before, people used to talk much *about* the poor, but now they talk more *to* the poor. That's a great change.



"My food
is to do the will
of the one who sent me,
and to complete
his work."
(Jn. 4:34)

"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work."

This marvelous sentence of Jesus can, in a certain way, be repeated personally by every Christian and, if put into practice, is capable of carrying us very far along the holy journey of our life.

Jesus, seated by Jacob's well in Samaria, had just ended his conversation with the Samaritan woman. The disciples, returning from a neighboring town where they had gone to buy food, were suprised to find the Master talking with a woman, but none of them asked why. When she left they encouraged Jesus to eat. Understanding their thoughts, he explained to them the reason for his actions by saying: "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

His disciples, however, did not understand; they thought he was referring to material food, so they asked one another if, by chance, in their absence someone had brought the Master something to eat. Jesus then openly affirmed:

"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work."

We need food every day in order to live and Jesus does not deny this. Here in fact he is specifically speaking of food, therefore of his own natural need. He does it however to affirm the existence and the need for another kind of food, a more important food, which he cannot do without.

"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work."

Jesus came down from heaven to do the will of the One who sent him, and to complete his work. He did not have thoughts and plans of his own, only those of his Father. The words he said and the works he accomplished are those of the Father; he was not fulfilling his own will but the will of the One who sent him. This was Jesus' life: to do it satisfied his hunger. Doing it, he nourished himself.

Complete adherence to the will of the Father was the characteristic of his whole life up to his death on the cross where he truly completed the work which the Father had entrusted to him.

"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work."

For Jesus, his food was to do the will of the Father because in doing it, in "assimilating" it, in "eating" it and identifying himself with it, he received life from it.

What is the will of the Father, his work which Jesus must complete?

It is that of bringing salvation to mankind, of giving to all the Life which will never die.

Only a few moments before, Jesus had communicated a seed of this Life, through his words and with his love, to the Samaritan woman. Very soon the disciples would see this Life sprout and grow since the woman quickly told other Samaritans about the wonderful treasure she had discovered and received: "Come and see a man...I wonder if he is the Christ?"

Speaking to the Samaritan Jesus revealed the plan of God who is a Father, namely, that all people receive the gift of his Life. This was the work that had been entrusted to Jesus to complete, a work which would then be entrusted to his disciples, to the Church.

"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work."

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

Can we also live these words of Jesus which so typically reflect his being, his mission, his zeal?

Certainly! We too will have to live as children of the Father through the life that Christ has communicated to us, and nourish our life with his will just as Jesus did.

We can do it by fulfilling, moment by moment, what he wants from us, doing it perfectly, as if we had nothing else to do. This is something which Pope John XXIII had resolved to do. God does not expect more from us than that.

Let us then nourish ourselves with what God wants from us moment after moment. We will experience the fulfillment of a life lived like this. It will give us peace, joy, happiness. It would not be exaggerating to say that it will give us to taste a touch of heavenly beatitude.

We, too, will share with Jesus, day after day, in the completion of the work of the Father which is our salvation and that of many others.

Chiara Lubich

THE MOST VALUABLE PIECE

We were settling into our new apartment and it seemed very bare and empty. Our furniture had not yet arrived from our previous home. I was particularly anxious to get some pictures up on the walls; having worked in a gallery for many years this was a big interest of mine even ahead of the more practical pieces of furniture.

For several weeks my husband had been asking me to help him decorate his new office and frame two beautiful posters he had purchased for this purpose. I kept putting it off, my mind being more occupied with the apartment and what it needed.

One evening while he was out doing some shopping, I glanced at the word of life pinned up on the kitchen wall: "Watch, be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for a man's life is not made secure by what he owns, even when he has more than he needs" (Lk. 12:15). I realized that my "idol" was my preoccupation with the apartment first and not in building mutual love. The presence of Jesus in our midst[1] through this mutual love should be our most valuable piece of 'furniture'.

I got out the frame kits and posters and started to assemble them. It turned out to be much easier that I had thought and I had the job completed in a very short time. They really looked good and I knew my husband would be delighted to finally have them. Being honest I felt that his office was even more drab than his apartment!

When he saw them he said they looked so good that we should keep them because he had been given two other prints for the office and he would help me frame them when he had more time over the weekend.

M.D.

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1) Cf. Mt. 18:20.

ESTABLISHING NEW RELATIONSHIPS

I am a carpenter and I had just begun a remodeling job with a group of other carpenters. In the group there was one I had never worked with before. I had heard that he had a very hot temper but I really didn't pay too much attention to these comments. We started working on the basement, putting in doors and closets. We had worked for a few days laying out and putting up walls and now we were ready to put up the panelling. All of a sudden I heard the noise of a hammer bouncing off a wall. I looked over and saw my new compan-

ion getting very upset. He had made a mistake and since he was really an excellent carpenter he couldn't tolerate having made that mistake. I said to him, "What's the matter with you? Can't you control yourself?" That was probably the worst thing in the world I could have said because then, not only was he upset at having made a mistake, he was also angry with me.

The word of life we were living that month was: "Love one another just as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). I realized that what I had said had certainly not been an act of love. "How can I love this fellow now?" I asked myself.

The next day, while we were working, I saw a big pile of dirt left behind after we had finished a job, so I went and cleaned it up. Later in the day there was a difficult job that had to be done. Instead of discussing who would do it, I just jumped right in and did it.

The next day I chose for myself all the little detail jobs that are more tedious, and I cleaned up after us at the end of the day. By the end of the week, though, I noticed that my friend was beating me to the broom and cleaning up the mess before I could get there; and when it came to the more difficult detail jobs, he would do more than his share. It was almost like a competition of love between us, as if he wanted to return this love, this small effort I had made to try and love him. We developed quite a good relationship and started working very well together.

One morning when I got to work he was sitting there waiting with a large cup of coffee for me and a big smile on his face. Our relationship had passed from just working together to being good friends. We talked about our families and discovered we had sons the same age. We even went out together on a few occasions with our boys and had a great time. I found out later that he had even established a new relationship with one of his sons, a relationship that had deteriorated a little because the father was always busy working. I was so happy to see how everything had worked out.

H.B.

A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT ATMOSPHERE

I was babysitting for my young nephew and niece while their parents were away on vacation. I had had a difficult night with little sleep because the children were unsettled obviously missing their mom and dad. The next day they were tired and it seemed that I could do nothing to keep them happy. After a while I gave up and told them to go to their room and play. I wanted some peace and quiet, but they kept interrupting, asking me to come and play with them. I finally told them rather crossly that I other things to do and that I wanted some time to myself. They looked disappointed but eventually went back to their room.

I tried to relax with a cup of coffee but I wasn't happy. That month the word of life was: "Obedience to God comes before obedience to men" (Acts 5:29). I remembered a line in the commentary which said: "We must see that goodness prevails in all the small everyday circumstances of our lives" and I knew that this will of God was expressing itself in these children too.

So I went to them and said I was sorry for being so cross. I asked them if they would like to help me decorate a cake I was making for lunch. They were so excited with this and I have to admit that I had to stop myself several times from taking over when I saw where they were putting the strawberries and cream. But in their eyes it was the most beautiful cake ever.

We asked two of their friends over to help eat it and for the rest of the day they played happily in the garden. There was no more fuss that night. It seemed that the atmosphere in the house had changed completely and we all had a good nights sleep.

M.D.

JUST SMALL MATTERS?

Working as a *per diem* nurse gives me the chance to work on different floors of the nursing home where I am employed. Before full exposure to a new floor I usually have an opportunity to become acquainted with the different residents, with their needs and various procedures.

Recently I started to work on a new floor and my day began with an orientation. While the head nurse was talking to me, one of the residents kept approaching

her and asking her to talk with him. He came up several times and each time she asked him to wait a moment; but he could not understand why and was sad.

How could I love both these people in this situation? How could I "make myself one" [1] with each of them? I started by listening as carefully as I could to everything that the head nurse was explaining to me, trying to understand and put myself in her situation. Then later, when I had the chance, I stopped by the man's room and asked him if I could help him in any way. In a low and stuttering voice he told me that he wasn't happy with the way his hair was combed and his laundry had not yet been brought back to his room. I realized they were small matters but with love and patience I listened to him and tried to reassure him that his hair looked fine, and that I would try and trace his laundry. I had the impression that he was happy in the end.

Later on in the afternoon the phone rang: the technician in the X-ray department wanted to take X-rays of that same patient. When I told him about it he said yes without any questions. I informed the head nurse. When she saw me at the elevator with him she looked surprised. "I couldn't believe it," she told me later; "I just couldn't believe it. We've been trying to convince him for months to go and have that X-ray taken and we were never successful."

M. B.

1) Cf. 1 Cor. 9:22.

ONE EVENING IN OSAKA

I had met the president of this large Japanese musical instrument company quite by accident a couple of years earlier. We were both in a hotel in the northwest United States. Because it was over a weekend, it seemed as though we were the only people staying in the hotel. We began a conversation, and were quite surprised to discover that we were both involved with music, although in different areas.

My new Japanese friend was having a problem communicating with some of the American companies, and over a period of time it was quite easy for me to use my contacts to help him.

On this evening in Osaka, I was his guest for dinner. After dinner he took me to a little night club. It had a very nice friendly atmosphere, and eventually the piano player asked my friend to sing a couple of songs. He sang a couple of popular American songs, and sang them very well. They then asked me to play the piano. I played some Bach and a couple of jazz tunes. At this point everyone in the club was like one big family.

As we sat having a drink together, my Japanese friend looked at me in a serious way and said, "You know, I don't understand you at all. You have done so many things to help me with the American companies, yet there is no way this can benefit you. Why do you do these things?" I really didn't know how to even begin to explain for this man, so I simply gave him a copy of the word of life for that month with its commentary. I suggested that at some quiet moment he read it, and he would understand why people do things without asking for anything in return.

Almost two years after this evening in Osaka, a business opportunity came up which I thought might be useful for my Japanese friend. I telephoned him to explain this possibility for him. It seemed as though he was not listening to me, and finally he said, "I don't want to be rude by interrupting what you are saying, but there is something I have been wanting to tell you for a long time. I want you to know that I am now of your faith. I now believe in God."

John Welch

Images FOR words

© Claude Desmarais

Let the coming
generation be
told of the Lord
that they may
proclaim to
a people yet
to be born
the justice
he has shown.

Psalm 22:32

FAMILY LIFE

Weakened family life is one of the greatest social ills of our time.
The "New Family" Movement has as its aim to bring the Focolare spirit of unity into family life, so that each family will be deeply united within itself and with other families.

STEP BY STEP

My husband and I have five children ranging in age from twelve to twenty-one. We have certain ground rules laid down in our family, and everyone has agreed to abide by them.

One day we all went out together for the evening. All, that is, except for our older son who had to work that night. Before leaving the house, my husband reminded our son not to have any friends over while we were away. Returning home that night, we walked in and found out son entertaining his friends. We could tell that they must have been there for most of the evening because the game table had been set up and used, and they were all sitting around the kitchen table drinking coffee and talking very casually as if nothing were wrong. Our other children were watching and waiting to see what the reaction would be. Calmly my husband asked our son's friends to leave. Sensing that something was wrong, they left immediately while our other children hurried straight to bed.

The three of us were finally alone in the kitchen, and I could see that things were going to be tough. My husband had very strong feelings about this matter, and he was not going to treat it lightly. Something had to be done immediately to make our son understand that he had deliberately disregarded our wishes and, what's more, that he seemed to think nothing of it. The atmosphere was tense, and at a certain point I felt that it would have been more love on my part if I left them alone to talk privately. It was hard for me to leave because deep inside I felt that this whole matter was not really such a drastic issue, and that had I remained in the room I would probably have sided with my son. I knew however, that I had to believe in the love of God for both my son and my husband in that moment, so I left.

After what seemed like an eternity my husband came to our room. I asked how things went and he told me that he had asked our son to leave our home and never return. I was stunned, but I felt it was not the moment to say anything. In my heart I renewed that commitment I had made to believe in the love of God no matter what happened.

That night I couldn't sleep. Many thoughts kept coming to my mind — "Where would he go to spend the night? How would he live and pay his rent? How would he continue with his college studies?" But even with all these thoughts, and the fact that it was difficult for me to understand what was happening, I knew I had to continue to love. If I could do this, then I was certain that God, who is Love, would show us what to do next.

The next day I waited all morning for some word from our son. In my heart I was sure he felt that we loved him and wanted to resolve this situation. Later that day he called. He explained that he hadn't realized he had done something so terribly wrong. He was sorry and wanted to come back home. I felt I had to help him to take the step of trying to understand the way his father was viewing this situation, the importance that this whole matter had for the rest of the family. It was a special moment. The result was an eagerness and willingness on the part of our son to begin a new relationship with his father. I told him to come back home about the time he knew his father would be returning from work as that would be a good opportunity for them to talk. He agreed.

They sat down together and talked for a long time in the backyard. Peeking through the window at their faces I sensed that things were going well.

Soon they both came into the house with big smiles. I was moved to see how the love of God had guided all of us, step by step, through this little crisis.

R.B.

THE DESIRE TO TRY TOO

Today I spent a quiet evening with my husband. Things went better than I could have hoped for. We had been out with friends celebrating a birthday and the atmosphere had been simple and joyful... full of love, I would say, even though I hardly dare to pronounce this word anymore. It seems so sacred to me now that I think I understand at least a little its meaning.

We had lived quite a few years together, my husband and I. Differences of character and ideas, however, drove us further and further apart over the years, and matters weren't helped by the fact that my husband started to see another woman. I couldn't bear it, while for him it was all quite normal. After our fourth child was born I couldn't take it anymore. I told him to choose: if he loved that girl he could just as well go with her. And so it ended. He left shortly after that for a city in the north and hard years followed. We managed to get by but I was always without peace, eaten away inside by suffering and resentment.

I few years ago, some neighbors invited me to a large international meeting in Rome. "Family and Love" was the title of the event. I didn't want to go; I had neither love nor family. But instead I went. A completely different world opened up before my eyes. Here suffering was no longer something to be thrown away; it was accepted, it bore fruit. Everything impressed me very much. One experience in particular really made me think. An American woman spoke about life with her alcoholic husband. I thought of my past, of my reactions, and suddenly I felt something new inside myself, like a desire to try it too.

After that, whenever my husband came to see the children, I tried to be attentive to his needs. I asked him how everything was going, how his girlfriend was, even if that cost me more than anything. I cooked the things he liked, and above all I avoided certain outward expressions that I knew bothered him.

After a few months my husband asked me if he could come more often and stay for a few days. He started spending more time with the children. I prepared a room for him for those days and when he left everything was out of place. I wanted to complain but I knew I couldn't. I put everything away with great care. If I do it willingly, I thought, it's the best way to love him.

Three months ago he decided to move back to our city, leaving his girlfriend in order to be closer to the children. I offered to help him furnish and clean the apartment he found, an offer which surprised and amazed him. He comes home more and more often now and the friendship between us is growing. No, it's more than friendship; now it's love. I am not expecting anything though. I just want to learn how to love him always better; then, whatever God wants...

S.- Holland

THE 'PRODIGAL' FATHER

It was a totally unforseeable event: my seventy-two year old father who had left our family more than forty years ago was inviting us, his three children, to a special meeting. All three of us went. His temperament was just as it had always been—resolute, practical. "I have only a few things to say," he began with the dryness of one who has reflected at length over what he has to say. "First of all, I ask you to forgive me for all the suffering I have caused you over all these years. Secondly, I want to thank you for the patience and goodness you have shown to me even when I violated your rights and you could have taken legal action to get me to respect them. Thirdly, I am asking you one more act of kindness: everything that I have is yours, but could you please leave the household objects for the woman with whom I have been living for some time now.

We were amazed. Just to hear the way he was talking was already a miracle. Moments of my adolescence suddenly flashed before my eyes: my mother's sad face, our daily suffering because of my father's absence. It was only since God had entered my life and that a slow "re-evangelization" had begun, that my attitude toward my father had changed. I remember the first time after many years that I

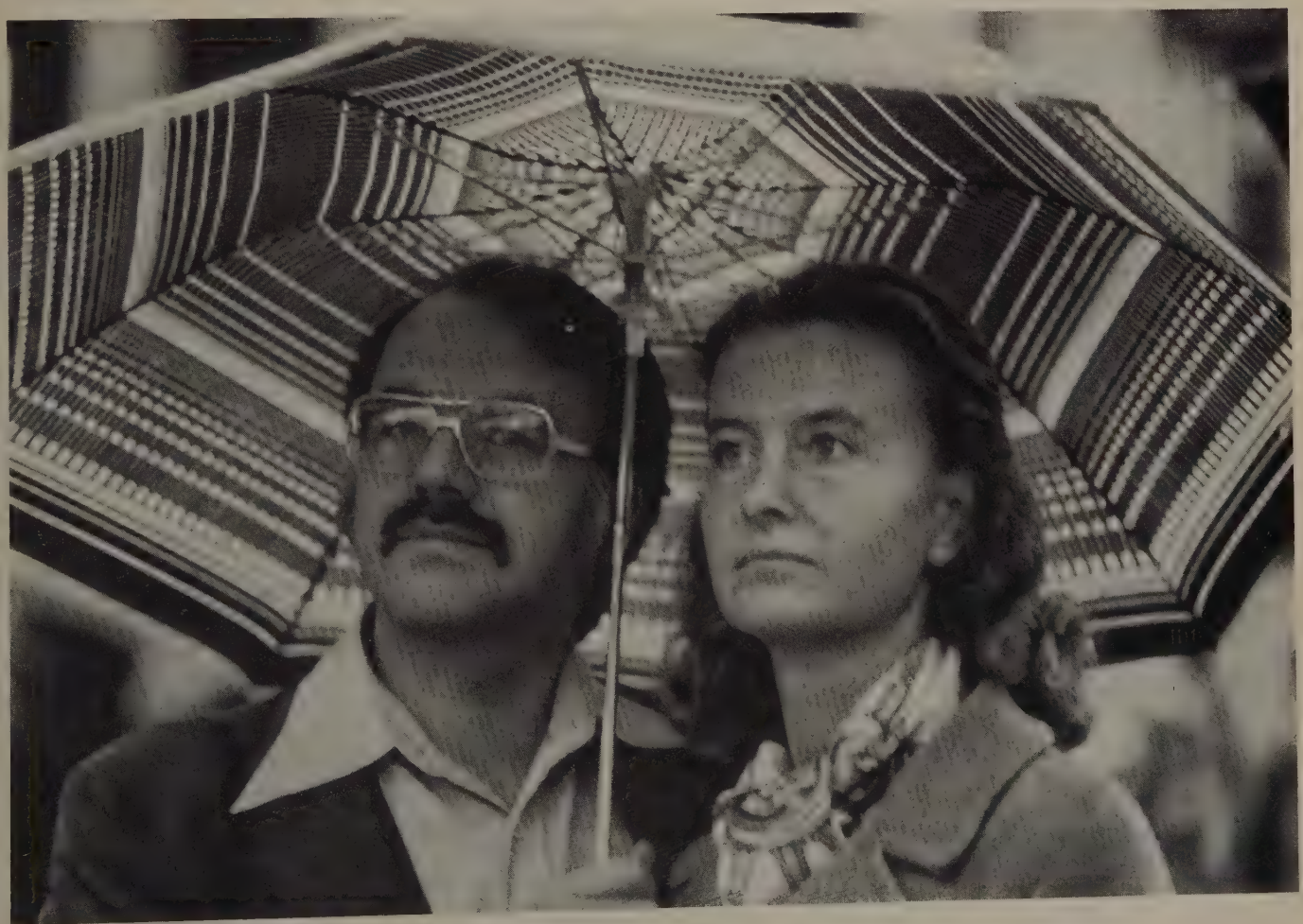
made it to breach the gap between us. It happened one day when he came for a visit. Instead of 'disappearing' as I usually did, I greeted him affectionately, even offering him some coffee to his great surprise. Something changed between us. After that episode it became always easier for me to chat with him about topics I knew he preferred in order to make him happy.

Then it was my brothers' turn. They had been drawn in by my example and they too made it to forgive my father and re-establish a bond with him.

Since he no longer felt judged by us, my father came to visit more often. He opened up and explained to us how everything had happened. Life hadn't been all roses for him either; suffering had worked in him as well. One evening a surprising encounter took place. It seemed to me that it was really like the "moment of God" for my father. Supported by my brothers, I spoke with him at length. I tried to make him understand that it was up to him to forget the past and change the direction of his life, that God loved him and would give him the strength to resolve his situation. When I left he seemed uplifted, as if he had decided something within himself.

His return home to my mother was not easy however. There were endless obstacles and difficulties of every kind. In the end he made it and it was the beginning, even at his age, of a completely new life. Often, laughingly, he would remark that he felt as if he had been reborn. In fact it does seem like he's a small child with so much ahead of him to be discovered.

H. - Brazil



INTO THE LIGHT OF DAY

Every day had its ups and downs. There were discussions and arguments. My wife Marie had told me that our third child was on its way. The first two were still small. Marie was frightened at the thought of what this third child would mean but she saw no alternative. Instead, right from the very beginning, I had been thinking of an abortion. My conscience was at peace, or rather I kept it at peace with a thousand justifications, the same ones that I kept repeating to Marie with growing firmness as she continued to waver and resist.

In the end I managed to paint such a black picture of the situation and re-inforce her own fears that she finally gave in. Of course it was easy then to find a doctor who would perform the abortion. Two days in the hospital and everything was over.

Or should I say everything was just beginning—sleepless nights, tormented days, nightmares. Marie was like a different person altogether. We barely spoke to one another and avoided at all costs the topic which, no matter what, was always looming over us. I remember one evening in particular. I came home from work but no one came to the door to meet me, not even the children. "I'm losing them too," I thought to myself. "What have I done?" I realized that our youngest child no longer came climbing up on my lap as she usually did taking my head in her hands and saying, "My daddy." A sense of guilt and regret welled up in me.

Marie grew sadder every day. She tired easily while I became more and more nervous and irritable. Even my colleagues were asking me if there was anything wrong. I fought the sense of guilt with all the arguments that I could think of but there was really no way to find peace.

One morning while I was crossing the street I came up behind a group of people who were heading for the church nearby. Their voices reflected a festive mood. A young man was carrying a baby wrapped warmly in blankets. They were bringing the child to be baptized. Without even realizing what I was doing I followed them into the church. As I entered I saw the green light of the confessional. Two people were waiting in line.

I had never even thought of this as a solution. The baby began to cry as I knelt down beside the priest and unloaded the weight I had accumulated over the past few months. I almost wanted him to give me a sharp reprimand but instead he listened in silence and, at the end, offered me a warm invitation to look ahead, to the present and the future, with a new commitment to live in humility and love.

I came out of the church into the light of day. I felt within myself a sense of serenity and profound peace. In that contact with the priest I had felt the mercy of God envelope me. I ran home and finally, after months of turmoil, I asked Marie to forgive me for what I had done. She began to cry as if unburdening herself, as if in forgiving me she also felt forgiven.

A.-France

The martyrdom of Polycarp

We are continuing the series of "First century reports" on the life and times of the early Church, and presenting—in a mock journalistic style—what might be the views and reactions of a contemporary writer as he reports the manner in which the truths of the Christian faith were welcomed and received—or rejected—at the time.

In this report we deal with the first martyrs who, through their witness under the supreme test, strengthened the faith of all Christians.

by SILVANO COLA

Marcion and Polycarp...two men, each with a vocation, each destined to influence history in their own way.

Marcion, that wealthy manipulator of men, excommunicated by the church in Rome, a born master builder, has founded a network of little churches all over Asia Minor as well as in the city of Rome in which to propagate his own ideas. "The apostles," he says, "were uneducated men. True they wrote the Gospels, but they did not really understand what they were writing. I alone can give you the truth about God and about the world."

To govern these little 'churches' he has set us 'bishops, priests and deacons'—just like the other Christian churches—but all created by himself. They claim to be descended from the apostles, just like the other Christian bishops, priests and deacons, but they are as much descendants of Peter as I am of Apollo!

Polycarp—on the other hand—had personally known the apostles, and had personally sat at the feet of no less a teacher than the apostle John. The apostles had considered him worthy to be consecrated bishop of Smyrna.

"He is my leader."

Polycarp had come up to Rome to visit the church there. He and Marcion met by chance in the street. Marcion said to him, "Hello, Polycarp, don't you recognize me anymore?" "Of course I recognize you; you're Satan's eldest son." Marcion stalked off to seek consolation from his adherents; while Polycarp returned to Smyrna where the persecution of the Christians was already in full swing. In fact, he was immediately arrested upon arrival. The Pro-Consul, seeing this as a possible excuse for wiping out the Christian's powerful influence in his region, ordered the bishop's execution after the briefest possible proceedings.

According to the report sent from the church at Smyrna to the Christians of Philomel in Phrygia which not only showed the stature of this great Christian but also the close communication which already existed between the various Christian communities, it appears that the Pro-Consul suddenly snarled out angrily at Polycarp, "If you value your life, swear by all the gods and curse your Christ!"

Polycarp replied with the utmost gentleness, "But how can I? He is my leader, and he is my savior. I served him for eighty-six years, and he has never once caused me a moment's regret. Why should I swear against him now?"

The bonfire was built, the stake erected, the executioner stood by with the nails waiting to secure the bishop to the stake. Polycarp, with a smile of such happiness one would have

thought that he was going to a wedding turned to him and said, "You can save the nails and conserve your energy, they are not necessary. Rest assured no matter how great the fire you may build around me, I shall be happy. My love for Jesus burns hotter than any bonfire."

While the crackling flames finally enveloped his body, Polycarp was heard to pray, "Almighty God and Father of your most beloved son Jesus, the Christ who taught us your name, God of all angels, of all powers and of all creation, I thank you for having this day deemed me worthy to meet martyrdom face to face, to resemble a little your Christ, thus making me able to rise again to eternal life with soul and body made incorruptible by the Holy Spirit... Let me also be accepted to live with you, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

One of the family

The whole Christian community was standing there, around their dying bishop, motionless and tense. All were moved with emotion. A pottery maker turned to whisper in the ear of a young woman holding a baby in her arms. "Did you hear that? He talked with God as if he were one of the family, as if he lived continually with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit! He spoke to them as if they were real people."

An older woman, hearing the conversation, spoke up, "You don't remember but about forty years ago we knew another bishop, Ignatius of Antioch who was thrown to the lions by order of the Emperor Trajan. Our bishop Polycarp knew him personally and often told us how Ignatius explained to the Christians that thanks to faith and to God's grace, they were the temple of God, and that he said, quite specifically, 'You carry within yourselves God the Father, the Christ and the Holy Spirit.' If then they live in us it is our own fault if we do not speak to them as Polycarp did a moment ago."

A student of philosophy, who was a recent catechumen at that time, stood a little ways off. He could not tear his eyes away from the scene of the flames consuming Polycarp. "What a man," he murmured to himself. "What an enviable death. How did he find the strength to restrain himself from crying out or giving way to despair? You can see that his love for God is stronger than the flames." The majority of those standing around were pagans and had been laughing and talking up until then. But look now how they too have gradually became more serious, almost rooted to the spot.

The problems facing the young catechumen, as a result of the martyrdom of bishop Polycarp have become traumatic. The disciples of Basilides say that martyrdom is totally irrelevant since there is no need to testify in this manner to the crucifixion of Jesus. However, since Paul had done so, and also Peter himself and Andrew also died as martyrs (and only recently even that famous philosopher from Palestine called Augustine has been martyred in Rome for trying to defend the truths of the faith.

Three questions

As the young catechumen said, "Seeing these champions give their testimony to Jesus by preferring to die for him rather than deny him, it makes you want to laugh when you hear the endless quibbling of these self-opinionated Gnostics." A few days later that same philosophy student approached one of the Christians to ask about Baptism. A presbyter asked him three questions: "Do you believe that Jesus was really Lord of the Universe; and in Jesus Christ our Savior, and in the Holy Spirit?" The catechumen answers: "Yes, I believe in them." Then the question "Do you believe that they are the one and only God?" "I believe it," the candidate answers. "Do you believe that he really died, that the Father really raised him to life again, and that the same Father, who is both his and ours, will also raise us again in Christ Jesus through the faith we have in him?" Once again the candidate replies, "I do so believe." Finally the presbyter proclaims: "By means of this water, and in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, you are now purified."

The young philosopher explained that after his baptism the whole Christian community in Smyrna rejoiced. He said it was a little embarassing but that he was able to smile and stammer, "I really feel like a different person. Pray for me that I might live and testify to

Design by Paolo Scirpa

"Go and baptize all men, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Jesus as our Bishop Polycarp has so recently done."

One hundred and fifty-six years ago, just before his death, Jesus—the author of this great teaching, told his apostles, "Go and baptize all men in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Children of the same Father

Since then, large numbers in almost every country of the known world today have been regenerated to a new life by means of pronouncing that formula which contains a synthesis of the truths which are to be believed: the truth that was given in Jesus. In this way the Christians say we know ourselves to be citizens of a new spiritual city where each person loves the other like children of the same Father. This profession of faith is called "the Symbol (sign) of the Apostles" and is the whole basis of the Christian way. Some say it is a mystery, but it is truth. Above all, it is so reassuring. It seems that we can understand something of it when we truly love, when we do not think only of ourselves, but of others, when we do to those nearest to us as we would do for Jesus in person.

In conclusion I cannot say that I really understand this, but I think that I would be incapable of loving in this way had not those, like Polycarp, not loved this way before us; that one and only Love who is three Persons in unbroken unity; and if Jesus had not left us His Spirit, giving to us that loving unity which is God himself, and with which we are able to love. □

The will of God, the love of God

I am twenty years old and I have been with the youth of the Focolare ever since I was a child. You could say I grew up with it and became fond of its spirituality, accustomed to the practice of trying to live the Gospel together with others. My life seemed happy and rather uneventful when suddenly about a year and a half ago I became ill. I had pains in my bones which did not seem to go away and my parents took me to the doctor. Tests were taken, a number of them. Then came the verdict — Leukemia. At the time I didn't quite understand what it was. I knew it was serious, that people died from it.

At this point I experienced the strength coming from being part of a Christian community. I knew that my friends, my family, were praying for me — that I was not alone.

I did not panic. In fact I was not afraid of what could happen. And I began to receive chemotherapy. I soon felt very sick, I lost my hair; there was a lot of pain those days. I knew I could love Jesus in that suffering. He had suffered for me. I wanted to love him and I tried to do it. I felt very strongly that Jesus was always with me.

For my part I tried to remain "up" and love those who happened to be around me. At times it became very difficult to do so and I had to renew my desire to do it over and over again — to remind myself that this illness was an expression of God's love for me, of his will for me.

My mom stayed always with me. We made a pact to live in such a way as to always merit Jesus' presence among us through our mutual love.

At a certain point I went into remission. It seemed that the leukemia was gone. Now I needed to go to another city for a bone marrow transplant.

Right at this point I developed pneumonia. I was very ill, and the doctors doubted I would make it. It was another chance to unite my suffering to His. In the end I made it to leave and go to the new hospital.

It was another painful beginning. Treatments again, side effects again. I lost my hair once more, I developed sores in my mouth and throat; I couldn't eat.

With my mother we helped each other to live one day at a time, one moment at a time. In each moment, I knew, I had to renew my love for Jesus in this suffering.

A lady in the room next to me had another kind of leukemia. She was older than I was and had had a transplant just two weeks before me. I noticed that whatever happened to her happened to me too soon after. For example, she had sores on her mouth and two weeks later I developed these sores too, etc. I began to worry about this especially when one day she relapsed. That really scared me. I wondered if I would relapse too. That day, deep inside I said another yes to the will of God, determined not to worry and to believe in his love. The day finally came when I was released from the hospital and returned home, to my city. Many unpleasant side effects still occurred but each one gave me the opportunity to renew my "yes." Also now, if I feel a pain in my leg, my first reaction is to think, "It's the leukemia coming back." But it's really just another chance to deepen my trust in God, believing that he will take care of me and that whatever happens is really his will for me.

Sheri Schiltz

The Way of Our Father Benedict

Our Father St. Benedict *by M. Regina Goberna, O.S.B.*
is one of the latest publications of **New City Press**
the publishing house of the Focolare Movement.
Below we are publishing an excerpt from this book with one of its illustrations by M. Lourdes Vinas, O.S.B.

This is the way along which Benedict,
The Beloved of the Lord, passed,
And which he left us as a lesson;
A way which intersects today
With the way of our world.

Whatever your actual situation,
Stop a moment, brother.
Stop to contemplate Life,
To offer a smile,
To give a hand,
To love in truth.
Stop and enter the graciousness
of Love.

Do not pass by.
God has found you too,
The God within you.
Stop and enter, you too,
into adoration,
Led by the harmonious rhythm
of silence,
Recollection and peace.
Stop within the cell
of your heart.

Yes, you too,
stop and become
A contemplative
in this world.
Don't be afraid.
Stop and bend your knee
with love.

...With you, I also have bent mine.

The young and the Gospel

This past year was my first year in high school. I had one teacher who ignored me every time I tried to talk to her. At first I just thought she was busy and had a lot of things on her mind. But this kept on happening. She wouldn't pay any attention to me and just walked past me as if I didn't exist. One day some of the kids told me that this teacher didn't like kids of certain nationalities like Latinos. At first I was really angry because I felt it wasn't right. But then I remembered I had to try and live like a Gen at any cost. I made up my mind I was going to love her no matter what.

I began by saying good morning to her every day, but she kept on ignoring me. She would also get upset if I did well on my tests but I kept on trying to be nice to her. My friends told me I was crazy and that this teacher didn't care but I knew that I had to go against the current and just love her as she was.

One day though I was about to give up because I had really been trying for months to love Jesus in this teacher with no results. I told my brother I was going to give up and he told me that a Gen never gives up. I remembered then that this was all a chance for me to love Jesus in his suffering, so I went back, ready to love my teacher as if I were meeting her for the first time.

One day, to my surprise, after I had said "Good morning," she turned around and said, "Oh, good morning Claudine." Now she's been really nice to me. I'm so glad I didn't give up!

Claudine
14 years old

It was Monday and I was heading for school. It was raining and the wind was blowing very hard. That was my first difficulty. Then when I was about half way to school the wind blew my umbrella all the way across the street and there was really a lot of traffic. First I was really complaining and worried because I didn't know what to do. Then I realized that this was a chance to love Jesus in his suffering. So I stopped worrying and crossed the street to get my umbrella.

When I got my umbrella I kept saying to myself, "Couldn't anyone give me a ride?" But then I knew that walking to school was the will of God for me in that moment and I was very happy. After school when I got home I got the 'hundredfold' because my classmate's mother offered to bring me to school every morning by car because she had seen how difficult it had been that morning.

Maria Stella
13 years old

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION
LIBRARY-SERIALS DEPT
2400 RIDGE RD
BERKELEY,CA 94709

PRINTED IN U.S.A.